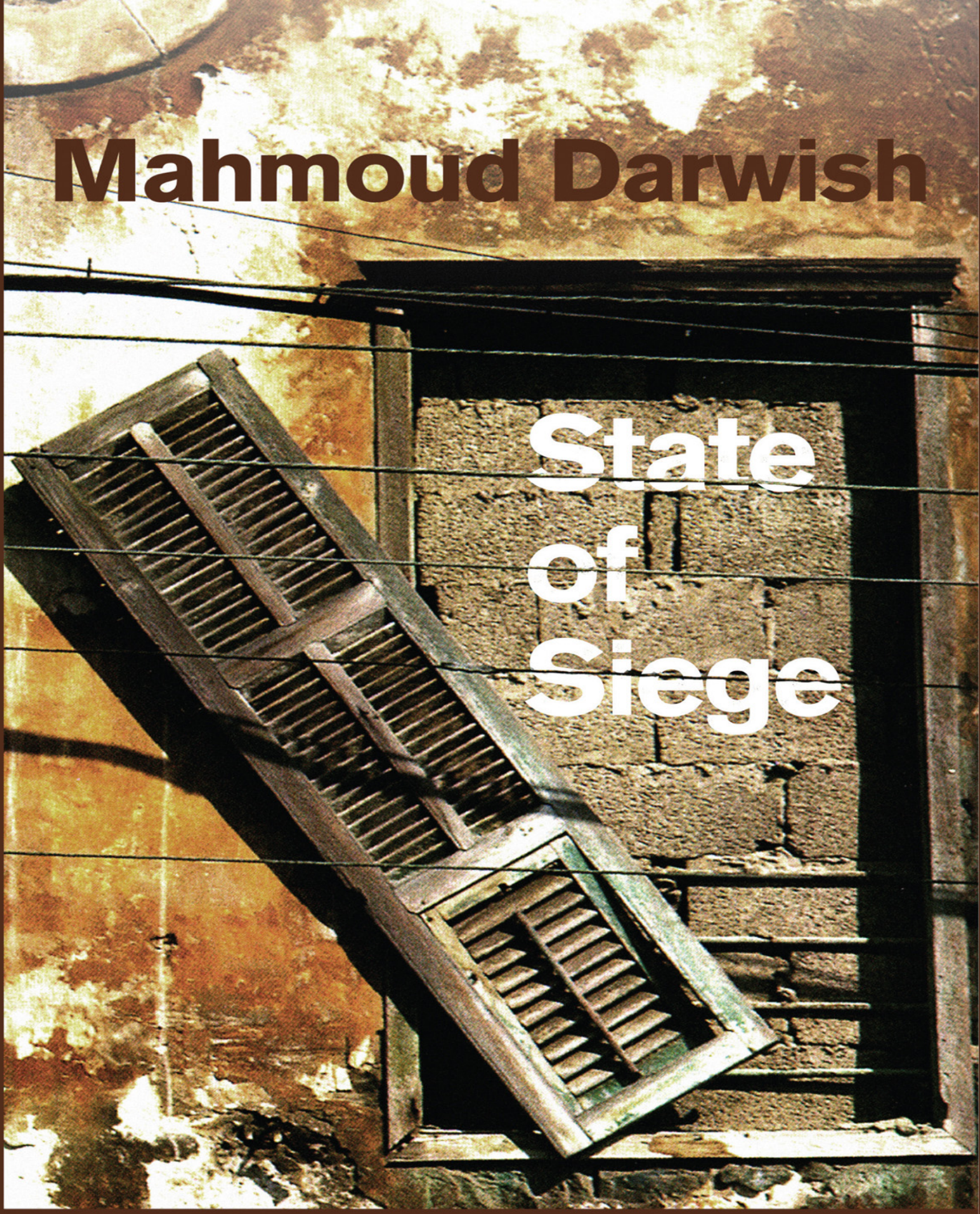
Mahmoud Darwish



State of Siege

Translated from the Arabic by Munir Akash and Daniel Abdal-hayy Moore
With an Introduction by Munir Akash

STATE OF SIEGE

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MAHMOUD DARWISH

State of Siege

حالة حصار

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and Daniel Abdal-hayy Moore
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Jusoor and Syracuse University Press

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Syracuse, New York 13244-5290

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First Copublication Edition 2010

10 11 12 13 14 15 6 5 4 3 2 1

Jusoor
Syracuse University Press

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

Cover art by George Azar
Back cover picture by Jamal Assaf
Cover design by Kinda Akash

ISBN 978-0-8156-0923-0

For a listing of books published and distributed by Syracuse University Press, visit our Web site at SyracuseUniversityPress.syr.edu.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available on request from the publisher.

This book is available to bookstores through
Longleaf Services, INC.
Post Office Box 8895
Chapel Hill, NC 27515-8895
800-848-6224

Manufactured in the United States of America

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For Fred Marchant, Kenneth Greenberg
and my wonderful family
at Suffolk University

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State of Siege

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The seeds of this work were planted seven years ago by the late Mahmoud Darwish. Mahmoud was to be presented with the Cultural Freedom Award by the Lannan Foundation in April 2002, and he wanted the translation of *The State of Siege* to be read at the ceremony. When he sent me *The State of Siege*, the latest of his work at the time, he also asked me to consult with an award-winning poet, Naomi Shihab Nye, for whom Mahmoud and I share great respect and admiration. On the 28th of April 2002 these two acclaimed poets of Palestinian origins, Naomi and Mahmoud, stood next to each other on the stage of Lang Performing Arts Center at Swarthmore College and read *The State of Siege* in both Arabic and English. To Naomi I extend my heartfelt gratitude for giving this work its very first bloom.

I need also to acknowledge the debt of the great work in this translation to my dear friend Daniel Abdal-hayy Moore. Daniel is perhaps the American poet most familiar with the work of Mahmoud Darwish. He has worked with me on Mahmoud's translations since the early nineties. Together we produced the first serious translation of Darwish in English, *The Adam of Two Edens*. He also worked with me on *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise*. When we finally decided to publish *The State of Siege*, Daniel painstakingly devoted himself to polishing the gem. It is perhaps his history as a poet in American English alone that has given him a certain sense of the heft and music of lines of poetry and their imagery when "bringing over" my translation into a more vivid, concise and, well, poetic one. I would also like to thank the editor of *Salamander* in which some of this translation first appeared.

Special thanks are due to a few of Darwish's zealous fans who kept insisting that I publish this work to remedy the great harm done to *The State of Siege* in English.

Munir Akash

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ICONS OF PAIN

Introduction by

Munir Akash

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Is there a sword that hasn’t yet been sheathed in our flesh?

— *Mahmoud Darwish*

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Once, while we were dining in the French restaurant, La Chaumière (Washington DC, June 1997), Mahmoud Darwish noted that the first Golgotha (*juljula)* in history occurred in his country of Palestine and that, in Palestinian folk tradition, Job's trial, the symbol of patience and long suffering, took place in a Palestinian village called Aljourah. "That sharpens my memory," he added, "and arms me with a great moral power to tame pain. Man always holds the power to rise above himself. By so doing, he finds meaning even in pain. Like love, pain belongs to the most basic human experiences that make me what *I am*."

Darwish was very young when he wrote "Identity Card," the impulsive expression of a young man living under inhumane conditions. From the very first, he found himself alone and lost and stripped of everything that made life worth living. But he also sensed that he had a value, and more importantly, that there was something crucial for him to say. Ever since that passionate outcry, "*Record: I am an Arab*," his challenge was to express a poet's particular way of being, not just his dimensionless presence in the world. Only a poem can shape such a meaning, vary its modes and allow its creator to utter a litany by which the old passionate cry resonates so deeply: "*I am I*."

Even as a child, he recited a "poem" in his school festival. In order to adjust his language and memory and bring it into line with the language and memory of the "strangers," an officer threatened him and spoke to him with extreme anger and vulgarity, and, later, a military judge severely punished him. Naturally, this early experience made a difference to his existence as a whole and influenced the formation of the profoundest meaning of his being. From that moment, Darwish wanted just one thing: to identify with his language — *to be*.

Now he knows where that being lies hidden — that being exists within the word alone for which he longs, the world of his own soul that he seeks.

Who am I? This is a question that others ask, but it has no answer.
I am my language; I am an ode, two odes, ten. This is my language.
I am my language. I am words' writ: Be! Be my body!
And I become an embodiment of their timbre.
I am what I have said to the words: Be the place where
my body joins the eternity of the desert.
Be, so that I may become my words.
No land on earth bears me. Only my words bear me.

In his struggle to reach the truth of his being, he transformed overwhelming pain into brilliant creation. His impulse to tame pain, to transcend wounds, and to reconcile hope with a life terrorized by cruelty makes our very being shine. Pain was his pen, as words were his wounds. The saga of his life demonstrates that perpetual tormenting relationship between pain and creativity. In every line of the present poem, *State of Siege*, we hear the rain and the wailing wind of pain that knits together the hearts of his people. But pain did not keep him centered in the flesh, but rather it empowered him with visions beyond pain and allowed him to transcend the world and the flesh, to transform his words into a necklace of stars around the neck of every beloved wandering Palestinian — the tortured soul of modern Job:

I stood on a wind, and my long night was without end.
…This is my language, a necklace of stars around the necks
Of my loved ones. They emigrated.
They carried the place and emigrated, they carried time and emigrated.

Job's trial, which armed Darwish with the great moral power to tame his and his people's pain, is perhaps one of the most compelling narratives in the human quest to make sense of our mortal existence. Job's increasing pain is bitterly reflected in the entire landscape of the *State of Siege*.

According to the myth, Satan's assaults created something akin to a ritual of dispossession, as Satan relentlessly stripped away all of Job's substance until "the greatest [and richest] man among all

the people of the East" ended up a piteous beggar sitting in misery on a dunghill. Savagely, Job was robbed of his herds, his servants were slaughtered, his sons and daughters killed by a whirlwind, and he himself smitten with an illness that carried him to the brink of the grave. But his justified complaint found no hearing with the judge. Job's right was refused in order that Satan not be disturbed in his play.

Like every refugee's tragic experience, Job's trial is not about patience in the abstract, nor a patient man. It's about an innocent, upright man who loses everything, suffers terribly, and demands to know *why*. Why does Job's God, suddenly and unpredictably deliver him to the spirit of evil and let him fall without compunction or obvious remorse into the abyss of pain? This absurd cruelty is meant to penetrate his vitals, to force him to succumb. The myth pictures a sacred executioner who knows no limit in his savage rage, and manifests himself precisely in the limitlessness of his rage. For the mythmaker, pain is Satan's weapon to turn Job against God. For Darwish, pain is the medium of divine ascension:

We do as those who ascend into heaven do:
we ignore pain

In the mythical narrative of Job's dreadful experience, the Swiss psychologist of cosmic consciousness, Karl Jung, sees it as just one example of the stark reality of Yahweh, and not of Satan at all. His *Answer to Job* is in fact the question that occurs to every Job: What power does Satan possess that his rival doesn't? And then, what hope is left for humankind?

Ever since those verses penned by Job,
we wait here for no one.

From the outset, the glue that binds Darwish's "*I am I"* is pain. It is the bitter encounter between being and pain that lies at the heart of Darwish's words. In them he mirrors all the turbulence and various flavors of pain experienced by his people. For him, pain is an outlet of the imagination, a medium of the visionary realm. "Pain is to my poetic inspiration as beauty is to visual stimulus," he once said. And it is pain that has often impelled him to forge visions that can only be called utopian:

Peace, the victory of natural beauty over swords —
iron shattered by dewdrops.

When he was only six years old, his mother saved his life from the indiscriminate massacres on the Palestinians, and they migrated together to Lebanon. Echoing with an eerie similarity the saga of Hölderlin's trip to Bordeaux and the Native Cherokee's Trail of Tears, they fled in the dead of an ice-cold night, fearing for their lives. One night sleeping by the filthy pool of Rmeish, the next night among pigs and cows, walking in pitch-dark woods in the middle of wild storms, they crossed fearsome snow-covered heights and rugged mountains, sometimes running, sometimes taking cover or creeping on their bellies. Add to that the memory of his entire village of Berweh being set on fire, demolished and obliterated, and its 224 houses eradicated soon after the creation of the State of Israel, together with those of 650 other Palestinian villages, and we can easily see the origin of Darwish's lifetime of pain.

The Israeli film-maker Simone Bitton went to Berweh, which was once teeming with life, to film whatever ruins of Darwish's childhood landscape remained, what might be left of intimate relics and personal traces that are evoked in his poems: a certain well, for example, catching the moon's reflection, the yellow inula flower blooming by its edge… a certain mulberry tree under which the Parish priest played checkers… the enchanting natural landscape overlooking the seashore of `Akka (Acre) that helped form one of its sons into a great poet. But when the Israeli settlers tried to prevent her from filming and started to show their muscle, she called the police. She told them she didn't want to quarrel with anyone and that all she wanted to do was film the village ruins. "What ruins are you talking about?" the police answered, "*the region is full of ruins*!"

In order to survive the ongoing massacre, the young boy fled his beloved country, ending up in a miserable refugee camp. "There, and later in my own country," he told me, "at the slightest disagreement with any one, I was hatefully labeled *refugee*."

From then on, Darwish's language memorialized and responded to the ache for home that tortures every Palestinian soul. It responded to the appeal of his being a mortal among mortals and a human in an authentic relationship with the earth and the heavens, to things and plants and animals, to all thoughts, all passions and all delights. Pain makes his language reflect the palpable presence of each of these things in the full appropriateness of their nature and holds them open to their manifestation, in the same way that being-Palestinian takes root, growing and blooming to its full potential. To understand how this language flows to achieve the truth of being, the world of Darwish's own soul, we must understand his existential identification with language — language as being and being as language.

I am my language

I am my words

In all its forms, language that flows to achieve the truth of being is by nature poetic. But contrary to his early poetry, Darwish's prose always gave the impression of walking on water — contrary to many of his first and most popular poems, which were written with a kind of brutal directness — more slogan-like than poetic, hardly qualifying as poems at all. Like the great Arab poet of the eighth century, Abu Nuwas, the young Mahmoud "Kept on prating, gabbling and babbling, until he finally produced poetry." But from first to last, Darwish's purest prose is as poetic as his most refined poem. In *Letters, Farewell to War, Farewell to Peace* or in *Memory for Forgetfulness,* for example, his prose has all the purity, sensibility, elegance, fineness and vision of poetry. Every word in his prose resonates; every sentence is pregnant with poetry. Anyone who has read his editorials in his journal, *Al-Karmel* (1981-2009), will realize that, like his later poetry, Darwish's prose subtly flows to arrive at the truth of being concealed in oblivion.

In an historical time of such cruel and mute oppression, it is the task of language to memorialize, and the poet to nurse memory and bring to bear the bright possibility of an authentic relationship with a real world.

In May 1983, Mahmoud and I met in Rome for the first time in six years, a few months after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the siege and destruction of Beirut and, consequently, his forcible removal to Tunisia along with thousands of his people. Late that night, following the Targa Europa Award ceremony, we sat in the hotel coffee bar with Uri Avnery, a life-long peace activist. Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, one of the foremost Arab modernists, was supposed to join us in Rome, but unfortunately he couldn't leave Baghdad due to its tragic war with Iran. In the dim lights of the coffee bar, surrounded by thick smoke and loud music, I heard Darwish for the first time refer to the conflict in historic Palestine as a conflict between two memories… "an historical memory and a negative mythical memory that blocks our access to true history." The mythical memory haunts Israeli lives, their culture, their politics and their guns.

Like a persistent dream, this mythical memory identifies and articulates the qualities of their association and attachment to the land, and shapes their discourse's claim over the present. "But at the end of the day, the whole structure of this memory is illusory mind-play," as he explained later (August 2001) in his Amman apartment.

Myths in this instance are an unquestioned belief held in common by those who laid the siege, the present-day occupiers. And the "state of siege" lived in its symbols before it was carried out to inflict such racking pain on an entire nation. "They were treated like animals," as President Jimmy Carter said regarding the siege of Gaza (The Washington Post, June 17, 2009). Mythical narrative was at its most powerful in its "adjustment" of the undesirable reality, and its consequent rationalization of the siege. And this mythical narrative is an onion made up of countless layers, one of which is to turn geography into myth:

Your tents are a guitar for the old conqueror's horses

who attack to turn a place into myth.

Another is to uproot the indigenous people from their country, which was turned into a mythical place, and then make them feel nothing but a void beneath their feet,

And we are forced to return to the inhospitable myths
where we have no place.

What flickers through Darwish's heart, then, is the constant fear of exile and fate imposed on him by myths. What power do myths have to turn a man against his brother?

She has a small moon, a servant combing
her shadow, and flickering through our hearts
is the fear of exile and fate imposed on us by myths.

This painful despair we sense throughout *State of Siege* mirrors a gloomy vision of men as both products and victims of the blind operation of myths that haunt their collective memory. The mythical memory of those who are laying vigorous siege to Darwish and his people is blind and irrational, and the source of all his distress and despair. But visionary pain seems to require conflict between two radically opposed memories, which vividly explains Darwish's despair and frustration about the bitter conflict between mythic memory (literally armed to the teeth) and helpless reality.

Mythical memory includes deterministic, imagined assumptions that give historical events a particular meaning. These assumptions act to displace from human consciousness all that is not related to them, therefore making them difficult to verify. They explain the past, present and future, confusing history with mythology, and presenting instead a history that is comprised of false narratives whose mythic ends simply imply distortion. Thus, whatever human sacrifice is entailed in preserving the myth — expulsion, spoliation, massacres, enslavement, genocidal siege — are all excusably worth every life lost and every drop of blood spilled. And brute force must then play a pivotal role in adjusting "the undesirable reality":

Myths refuse to adjust their plots.
They might mesh, for just a moment, with a certain flaw.
Ships might drift towards land, towards a bewildered land,
and the imaginary might afflict the real.
But they refuse to adjust their plots.
To confront an undesirable reality they simply
"adjust" it with bulldozers.

As evidence, the poem is not only aesthetic, it is also a sigh that for Darwish is indispensable for human life to recover from its state of oblivion, obscurity and neglect. He heaves this sigh from his entire intellectual, emotional and spiritual being and transforms it from a simple deep breath into seeds of new life. Thus it becomes the creative source of the humanness of that being which oblivion concealed. William Blake, in a line that warrants long pondering, from his poem *The Grey Monk,* wrote that, "For a tear is an intellectual thing, /And a sigh is the sword of an Angel King."

Darwish's poetic creativity stems from "language-as-being," that is capable of rising again from the dead. It employs here what "being-as-language" is called upon by nature to employ in nature's way: to stand up to pain and death, to defy oblivion in order to continue to be, to have actual being, to exist and be real in a real world.

No poet has pictured the manifold landscapes of Palestinian oblivion more vividly than Darwish. By stirring up deep-souled feelings and portraying vivid memorials, his poetry — independent of epoch and culture — will keep the Palestinian collective memory alive for generations to come.

Like the crucifixion artists, Darwish uses pain to emphasize the humanness of a contemporary crucified Jesus, in poems resembling nothing so much as icons of torment and denial. Based on actual experiences, all of the iconic stanzas of *The State of Siege* contain the vivid colors of emotions. Icons are not related to a single country or something specifically geographical, but to limitless pageants of glowing consciousness. In them we no longer see the individual face of the Palestinian, but the human union of all time and space. We penetrate to a reality more native to Jesus and Job, the human pain that is around us and in us. Sometimes it is straightforwardly clear and lucid, other times it is concealed behind the passing clouds of symbols. But each icon opens up a new horizon in the constant effort to communicate the vision.

With *State of Siege*, all adverse mythical memories have been dispelled, for nature is now identified with the natural, man is now at home in it, free through the acquaintance he has gained with nature. In his birthplace of Berweh, the young Darwish used to run away from home and sit for hours and hours in a tree nook, listening to a tiny breeze dance with a leaf or watching dew drop from wild flowers to the ground in the early morning. “That tree nook was to me as throne is to a king.”

All the losses, everything swallowed by and into darkness and oblivion, are now recovered in the poem. Dawn and poetry are synonymous. They recognize no barriers — they open horizons and joyously dance for the rising sun. Memory now lives in the word happily ever after — the word as power of creation residing in the poet’s soul — and the lost realm in all its shining splendor both visible and near. Sooner or later, Adam and Eve will retrieve their Garden of Eden.

It is by Darwish’s existential identification with language that he makes indelibly clear and vivid what poetry can be, and how it can magnificently grant the poet his being: “I know they’re strong and can invade and kill anyone. But they can’t break or occupy my words,” he says. Only by the living word does Darwish’s actual self-consciousness come into existence. Being and words mirror each other, each in its own way. In the word, he settles his being.

I am not mine
I am my words

For Darwish, life alone is not qualified to reconcile self-consciousness with being, while a poem can. Life does not die in what is poeticized, for here being has become perennial in the poem, and a poem of such existential impulse and force is a perennial poem, because its qualities inhere in the universal and have a place in all the multifarious varieties of our humanity.

Boston,

July, 2009

* Unless indicated otherwise, all these translations are from *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise*, translated with Carolyn Forché (University of California Press) and all quotations by Darwish are from a long interview with the poet. This interview will be published in a book in Arabic and then in English.

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STATE OF SIEGE

Written in January 2002
Ramallah, Palestine

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هنا، عندَ مُنْحَدرات التّلالِ، أمامَ الغروبِ
وفُوّهة الوقتِ،
قُرْبَ بساتينَ مقطوعةِ الظلِّ
نَفْعلُ ما يفْعَلُ السُجَناءُ،
وما يفعلُ العاطلون عَن العَمَل:
نُرَبّي الأملْ.

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Here on a hill slope facing the sunset and the wide-gaping
gun barrel of time
near orchards of severed shadows
we do as prisoners and the unemployed do:
we nurse hope.

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بلادٌ على أُهْبَةِ الفجر،
صِرنا أَقَلَّ ذكاءً،
لأنَّا نُحملقُ في ساعةِ النصر:
لا لَيْلَ في ليلنا الـمُتَلألِىء بالـمدفَعِيّةِ
أعداؤنا يسهرونَ
وأعداؤنا يُشْعِلون لنا النورَ
في حلكة الأقبيةْ.

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With a country on the verge of dawn,
we remain slightly slack-jawed as we
keep our eyes trained on the victory hour.

There is no night in our night kept lit
by the glitter of artillery –
our enemies stay up late.
They fill our dark cellars
with light.

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هنا، بعد أَشعار «أَيوب» لم ننتظر أحداً...

هنا، لا «أَنا»
هنا يتذكّرُ «آدمُ» صلصالَهُ

سيمتدُّ هذا الحصار إلى أن نُعَلِّم أَعداءنا
نماذجَ من شعرنا الجاهليّ.

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Ever since those verses penned by Job,
we wait here for no one.

The “I” no longer exists here
and Adam remembers his primordial clay.

This siege won’t end until we teach our enemies
a few odes from our pre-Islamic days.

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أَلسماء رصاصيَّةٌ في الضُّحى
برتقاليَّـةٌ فى الليالي. وأَما القلوبُ
فظلَّت حياديَّـةً مثل ورد السياج

في الحِصارِ، تكون الحياةُ هى الوقتُ
بين تذكُّرِ أَوَّلها
ونِسيان آخرها...

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At mid-morning the sky's as dull as lead,
at night it's orange, while hearts stay
as neutral as roses on a fence.

Under siege,
life is measured between the memory of its beginning
and the oblivion of its end…

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أَلحياة.
الحياةُ بكاملها،
الحياةُ بِنُقصَانها،
تستضيفُ نجوماً مجاوِرَةً
لا زمانَ لها...
وغُيوماً مُهاجرةً
لا مكانَ لها.
والحياةُ هنا
تتساءلُ
كيف نُعيدُ إليها الحياةْ

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In fullness as well as emptiness
life plays host to neighboring stars in their timelessness,
and restless clouds migrate from one nowhere to another.
Life wonders
how can we bring *life* to life here.

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يقولُ على حافّة الموتِ:
لم يبقَ بي مَوطىءٌ للخسارةِ،
حُرٌ أنا قُرْبَ حُرّيتي
وغدي في يدي...
سوفَ أدخُلُ، عما وليلٍ، حياتي
وأُولَدُ حُرّاً بلا أَبَوَين،
وأختارُ لاسمي حروفاً من اللاَّزوَرْد...

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At the brink of death, he says:
“I have nothing to lose.
Free, here at least I’m close to my freedom,
and tomorrow is at hand…
In a while, I’ll bond with my life
and be reborn without parents: *free*!
This time I’ll have my name inscribed
in letters of lapis lazuli…”

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هنا، عند مُرتفعات الدُّخان، على دَرَج البيت
لا وَقْتَ للوقتِ،
نَفْعَلُ ما يفعَلُ الصاعدونَ إلى اللهِ:
نَنْسَى الأَلَم

الأَلَمْ
هُوَ: أن لا تُعَلِّق سيِّدةُ البيت حَبْلَ الغسيل
صباحاً، وأن تكتفي بنظافةِ هذا العَلَمْ

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But there’s not even time for time here.
At the smoking heights near our neighborhood stairways,
we do as those who ascend into heaven do:
we ignore pain.

Pain—
when a housewife can’t hang her laundry out on the
line in the morning
and makes excuses for the cleanliness
of this flag.

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لا صدىً هوميريّ لشيء هنا.
فالأساطيرُ تطرُقُ أبوابَنا حين نَحتاجُها
لا صدىً هوميريّ لشيءٍ...
هنا جنرالٌ يُنَقّبُ عن دَوْلة نائمَةْ
تحتَ أنقاضِ طروادةَ القادمَةْ

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There are no echoes from Homer here.
When myths are needed they simply knock on our doors.
No Homeric echoes for anything…
only a General digging up a comatose state
under the ruins of an encroaching Troy.

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يقيسُ الجنودُ الـمَسافةَ بين الوجود
وبين العَدَمْ
بمنظار دَبَّابةٍ...

نقيسُ الـمَسافَةَ ما بينَ أَجسادِنا
والقذيفةِ... بالحاسَّة السادسةْ

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To measure the distance between being and nothingness,
soldiers use the scopes mounted on their tanks.

We use our sixth sense to measure the distance
between our bodies and flying shells.

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أَيُّها الواقفون على العَتَبات ادخلوا،
واشربوا مَعَنا القهوةَ العَربيَّةَ
[قَد تَشعُرونَ بأَنَّـكُمُ بَشَـرٌ مثلنا]
أَيُّـها الواقفِون على عَتَباتِ البيوتِ
اخرجوا من صباحاتنا
نَطمئنَّ إلى أَنَّــنا
بَشَرٌ مثلكُمْ!

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You, standing at our thresholds, come in,
sip some Arab coffee with us!
You may feel you’re as human as we are.

You! At the thresholds of our houses,
vacate our mornings,
so we may be *certain*
we’re as human as you are.

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نجدُ الوقتَ للتَسليةْ
نلعب النرْدَ، أو نتصفَّحُ أَخبارَنا
في جرائدِ أَمسِ الجريحِ،
نُقرأُ زاويةَ الحظّ: في عامِ
ألفينِ واثنينِ تبتسمُ الكاميرا
لـمواليدِ بُرْجِ الحصارْ

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We have a little time for recreation – we play dice, read our news
in the papers of yesterday's hemorrhages.
In our horoscopes we read that in the year 2002
the camera will smile for people born
under the Zodiac *Sign of the Siege*.

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كُلَّما جاءَني الأمسُ، قُلتُ لَهُ:
ليس موعدنا اليوم، فلتبتعدْ
وتعالَ غدا!

قال لي كاتبٌ ساخرٌ:
لو عرفتُ النهايةَ، منذ البداية،
لم يَبقَ لي عَمَلٌ في اللُّغَةْ

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Each time yesterday faces me,
I tell it: “No rendezvous today – go away!
Come back tomorrow!”

A humorist once said to me:
“If I knew how things would turn out
from the very beginning,
I’d never use words.”

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كُلُّ مَوْتٍ،
وإنْ كان مُنْتَظَراً،
هُوَ أوَّلُ موتٍ
فكيف أرى
قمراً
نائماً تحت كُلِّ حَجَرْ؟

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Every death,
even the most expected one,
is the very first death.
So why do I find
a moon
sleeping under every stone?

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أُفكّـرُ من دون جَدْوَى:
بماذا يفكرُ مَنْ هُو مِثلي، هُناكَ
على قمَّة التلِّ، منذ ثلاثةِ آلافِ عامٍ،
وفى هذه اللحظةِ العابرةْ؟
فتوجعُني الخاطرةْ
وتنتعشُ الذاكرةْ.

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I ponder in vain:
what can someone, standing
on the top of a hill for three thousand years,
just like me,
be thinking?
What thoughts can be passing through his mind
right now?
This speculation pains me
and reawakens my memory.

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عندما تختفي الطائراتُ تطيرُ الحماماتُ،
بيضاءَ، بيضءَ، تغسلُ خدَّ السماء
بأجنحةٍ حُرَّةٍ، تستعيدُ البهاءَ وملكيَّةَ
الجوِّ واللَهْوِ. أعلى وأعلى تطيرُ
الحماماتُ، بيضاءَ بيضاءَ. لَيْتَ السماءَ
حقيقيّةٌ [قال لي رجلٌ عابرٌ بين قنلتيْن].

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When warplanes leave the sky
white doves take flight
to scrub the blue with their free wings,
restoring its magnificent sheen and their sovereignty over
open space and play, their white wings
soaring higher and higher.
“Ah, If only the sky were real!” said one man
slithering in between two bombs.

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الوميضُ، البصيرةُ، والبرقُ
قَيْدَ التشابُهِ...
عَمّا قليلٍ سأعرفُ إن كان هذا
هو الوَحْيُ...
أو يعرفُ الأصدقاءُ الحميمونَ
أنَّ القصيدةَ مَرّت،
وأودتْ بشاعِرِها...

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“*Brightness, insight and lightning are all alike...*”
In a little while I’ll learn if that was
a revelation, or if my close friends find out that
an ode flashed into its poet and
killed him on the spot.

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[إلى ناقدٍ:] لا تُفَسّرْ كلامي
بملْعَقَةِ الشايِ أو بفخاخِ الطيورِ!
يُحاصِرُني في الـمَنام كَلامي،
كلامي الذي لم أَقُلْهُ،
وَيَكْتُبُني ثم يتركُني باحثاً
عن بقايا منامي...

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To a critic: Please don’t interpret my words
with teaspoons and bird snares!
I’m already besieged by my own words in my dreams –
words I might have never even said!
They set me down in writing
then abandon me
to seek the rest of my dream without them.

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شَجَرُ السّرْو، خلف الجنود، مآذنُ
تحمي السماءَ من الانحدار. وخلفَ سياج
الحديد جنودٌ يبولون - تحت حراسة دبّابةٍ -
والنهارُ الخريفيُّ يُكْملُ نزهتَهُ الذهبيَّــةَ
في شارعٍ واسعٍ كالكنيسةِ
بعد صلاةِ الأَحَدْ...

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Cypress trees form minarets behind lines of soldiers
keeping the sky from tumbling down.
They piss, guarded by tanks, behind an iron fence.
Autumn continues its golden journey in a street as wide
as a church after Sunday prayer…

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بلادٌ على أُهْبَةِ الفجرِ،
لن نخْتَلفْ
على حصَّة الشُّهداءِ من الأرضِ،
ها هُمْ سَواسِيَةٌ
يَفرشون لنا العُشْبَ
كيْ نأتلفْ!

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With a country on the verge of dawn
we can’t argue over land allotments set aside for martyrs.
Here as equals, they spread fresh grass under us so we can
enjoy our intimacy.

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نُحِب الحياةَ غداً
عندما يصل الغَدُ سوف نُحبُّ الحياة
كم هِيَ، عاديـ ةً ماكرةْ
رماد يةً أو مُلَوَّنَـةً،
لا قيامةَ فيها ولا آخِرَةْ.
وإن كانَ لا بُدّ من فَرَحٍ
فليكُنْ
خَفيفاً على القلب والخاصِرَةْ!
فلا يُلدَغُ الـمُؤْمِنُ الـمُتَمَرَّنُ
من فَرَحٍ ... مَرَّتَيْن!

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We love to live *tomorrow*.
But when tomorrow comes we'll love life just as it is,
normal and wily, gray and multi-colored,
with no apocalypse and no doomsday.
And if there be joy, let it be light on our hearts and midriffs!
"A true believer is not stung twice
by the same… joy."

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[إلى قاتلٍ:] لو تأمَّـلْتَ وَجْهَ الضّحيّـةْ
وَفَكّرْتَ، كُنْتَ تَذَكّرْتَ أُمَّـكَ في غُرْفَةِ
الغازِ، كُنتَ تَحَرَّرْتَ من حكمةِ البندقيَّةْ
وغيَّرتَ رأيَكَ: ما هكذا تُسْتَعادُ الهُوِيَّة!

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To a killer:
if you had looked into the face of your victim
and thought carefully,
you might have remembered your mother in the Gas Chamber,
and freed yourself from the rifle's prejudice
and changed your mind.
Come now, this is no way to restore an identity!

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[إلى قاتلٍ آخر:] لو ترَكْتَ الجَنينَ
ثَلاثينَ يوماً، إذاً لتغيَّرَتِ الإحتمالاتُ:
قد ينتهي الاحتلالُ ولا يتذكَّـرُ ذاك
الرضيـعُ زمان الحصار،
فيكبر طفلاً مُعافَى، ويُصبحُ شابّـاً
وَيَدْرُس في معهدٍ واحِدٍ معَ إحدى بَناتِكَ
تاريخَ آسيا القديمَ
وقد يَقَعانِ معاً في شِباكِ الغَرامِ
وقد يُنْجبانِ ابنَةً [وتكونُ يهوديّةً بالولادةِ]
ماذا فَعَلتَ إذاً؟ صارت ابنتُكَ الآنَ أرملةً
والحفيدةُ صارت يتيمةْ
فماذا فَعَلْتَ بأسرتك الشّـاردة؟
وكيف أَصَبتَ ثلاثَ حمائمَ بالطلقة الواحدة؟

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To another killer:
if you had given the embryo thirty more days,
probabilities might have changed,
the occupation might have ended,
the infant wouldn’t recall this time of siege
but would grow up healthy, enter school
with one of your daughters,
study the history of ancient Asia,
fall in love, have a baby girl
…Jewish by birth.
Instead what have you done?
Your daughter is a widow,
your granddaughter an orphan.
And what have you done with your own displaced family?

How did you manage to shoot
three doves with a single shot?

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لم تكنِ هذه القافيةْ
ضروريَّةً، لا لضبط النغمْ
ولا لاقتصاد الألَمْ
إنها زائدةْ
كذبابٍ على الـمائدةْ

الضبابُ ظلامٌ، ظلامٌ كثيفُ البياضِ
تُقَشّرُهُ البتقالةُ والـمرأةُ الواعدةْ

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That last couplet in near-rhyme wasn't necessary
neither to fine-tune the music nor to combat the pain –
it's an annoying presence,
like a fly at a banquet.

The fog here is a thick white darkness
dispelled from time to time by
orange flashes and an
alluring woman.

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وحيدون، نحن وحيدون حتى الثمالة،
لولا زياراتُ قَوْسِ قُزَحْ

هل نُسيء إلى أحد؟ هل نُسيء إلى
بَلَدٍ، لو أُصِبْنا، ولو من بَعيد،
ولو مرةً، برذاذ الفَرَح

الحصارُ هو الانتظار
هو الانتظارُ على سُـلَّم مائلٍ وَسَطَ العاصِفَةْ

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Sure, we’re head over heel in loneliness
without the occasional visitation of rainbows.

Do we hurt anyone or harm any country
if once in a while we’re spattered from a distance
by a light drizzle of joy?

The siege is a waiting game,
time held suspended on a ladder
leaning into the eye of a storm.

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لنا أخوةٌ خلف هذا الـمدى
أخوةٌ طيِّبون، يُحبُّوننا، ينظرون إلينا
ويبكون، ثم يقولون في سرِّهم:
«ليتَ هذا الحصار هنا علنيٌّ...»
ولا يُكْمِلون العبارةَ: «لا تتركونا
وحيدين.. لا تتركونا»

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Behind this wide horizon
pure-hearted brothers and sisters join together
with love for us, gazing at us, eyes full of tears,
repeating in their hearts:
“*If only the siege were openly…*”

but they don’t finish their phrase:
“*Don’t leave us alone,*
please don’t leave us.”

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ألقبائلُ لا تستعينُ بكسرى
ولا قَيْصرٍ، طَمَعاً بالخلافةِ،
فالحُكْمُ شُورى على طَبَق العائلةْ
ولكنَّها أُعجِبَتْ بالحداثَةِ
فاستبدلَت
بطائرةٍ إبِلَ القافلةْ

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Tribes don’t plead with Khosrou or Caesar
to help them inherit their throne.
It’s handed to them on a familial platter
consulting among themselves.
Admiring modernity, they’ve replaced
camel caravans with airplanes.

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سأَصرُخُ في عُزْلتي،
لا لكيْ أُوقِظَ النائمينْ
ولكنْ لتوقِظَني صَرختي
مِنْ خيالي السجينْ!

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In my solitude, I scream out loud –
not to wake everybody from their deep sleep,
but to shake myself from my own captive imagination!

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أَنا آخر الشعراء الذين
يُؤرِّقهمْ ما يُؤَرِّقُ أَعداءَهم:
رُبَّما كانت الأَرضُ ضَيِّـقةً
على الناس،
والآلهة

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I’m one of the last poets who loses sleep
for the same reason our enemies do:
this land might just be cinched too tight
for a population of humans and gods.

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هنا تَتَجَمَّعُ فينا التواريخُ حمراءَ،
سوداءَ. لولا الخطايا لكان الكتابُ
الـمُقَدَّسُ أَصْغَرَ. لولا السرابُ لكانت
خُطى الأنبياءِ على الرمل أقوى، وكان
الطريقُ إلى الله أَقْصَرَ
فَلْتُكمِلِ الأبَدِيَّةُ أعْمالَها الأَزَليّةَ
أمَّا أنا، فسأهمِسُ للظلِّ: لو
كان تاريخُ هذا المكانِ أقلَّ زحاماً
لكانت مدائحُنا للتضاريس في
شَجَرِ الحَوْرِ... أكثرْ!

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We’re overcrowded with red histories and black histories.
Without sins, the holy book would be briefer.
Without the shimmering mirage, our prophets’ footprints
would be more deeply etched in the sand
and the path to God shorter.
Let eternity complete its timeless works!
As for me, I’ll whisper to the shades: *Oh if only*
the history of this place were less crowded,
then our eulogies to the poplar tree’s bark
would be… more plentiful!

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خَسَـائرُنا: من شهيدَيْن حتى ثَمانيةٍ
كُلَّ يوم،
وعشرةُ جَرْحى
وعشْرونَ بيتاً
وخمسونَ زيتونةً،
بالإضافة للخَلَل البنيويّ الذي
سيُصيبُ القصيدةَ والـمسرحيّةَ واللوحةَ الناقصةْ

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Our daily victims are:
between two and eight martyrs,
ten wounded,
twenty homes,
fifty olive trees,
and the structural destruction of the ode, the play
and the unfinished painting.

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نُخَزِّنُ أَحزانَنا في الجِرار، لِئَلاَّ
يراها الجنودُ فيحتفلوا بالحصار...
نُخَزِّنُــها لمواسمَ أخرى،
لذكرى،
لشيءٍ يفاجئُنا في الطريق.
فحين تصيرُ الحياةُ طبيعيَّةً
سوف نحزنُ كالآخرين لأشياءَ شخصيّةٍ
خَبَّـأتْها عَناوينُ كبرى،
فلم نَنْتَبِهْ لنزيف الجُروح الصَّغيرةِ فينا.
غَداً حينَ يَشفَى المكانُ
نُحِسُّ بأعراضِهِ الجانِبيّةْ.

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We store our misery in jars hidden away from
soldiers who fancy the siege a cause for celebration…
We store our misery for future seasons
as mementos
in case something takes us by surprise in the streets.
Only when life gets back to normal again
can we grieve like everyone else over personal matters
now pushed to the back pages so we'll
forget our minor wounds.
Tomorrow we'll feel the side effects
when this place gets its health back.

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في الطريق الـمُضاءِ بقنديل مَنفى
أرى خيمةً في مهبِّ الجهاتْ:
الجَنوبُ عَصِيٌّ على الرّيحِ،
والشّرقُ غَرْبٌ تَصَوَّفَ،
والغربُ هُدْنَةُ قَتلى يَسُكّونَ نَقْدَ السّلام.
وأَمّا الشمالُ، الشمالُ البعيد
فليس بجغرافيا أَو جِهَةْ
إنّه مجمعُ الآلهةْ!

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On this road lit by the lantern of exile,
I see a tent open to all directions:
the South stands firm in defiance of the wind,
the East becomes a mystical West,
the West a treaty by the dead who mint coins of peace.
And as for the North, the far North, it’s neither
a Geography nor a direction –
it’s a pantheon for the gods.

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يقولُ لها: انتظريني على حافة الهاويةْ
ذقولُ: تَـعالَ... تَـعالَ! أنا الهاويةْ

قالت امرأةٌ للسحابة: غَطّي حبيبي
فإن ثياني مُبَلَلَةٌ بِدَمِهْ!

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“Wait for me at the edge of the abyss,” he says to her.
“No, come on! I *am* the abyss,” she says.

A woman said to a cloud: “Cover my beloved –
my clothes are soaked in his blood.”

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إذا لم تَكُنْ مَطَراً يا حبيبي
فَكُن شـجَراً
مُشْـبَعاً بالخُصوبَةِ... كُنْ شَجرا
وإن لم تَكُنْ شَجراً يا حبيبي
فَكنْ حجراً
مُشْـبَعاً بالرطوبةِ... كُنْ حجرا
وإن لم تكنْ حَجراً يا حبيبي
فَكنْ قَمَراً
في مَنامِ الحبيبةِ... كُنْ قَمَرا
[هكذا قالت امرأةٌ
لابنها في جنازته]

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“If you were not a rainfall, my beloved
be a tree
bursting with fertility…
be a tree!
If you were not a tree, my beloved
be a stone
bursting with dew…
be a stone!
If you were not a stone, my beloved
be a moon
in your lover’s dream…
be a moon!”
…said a woman to her son
at his graveside.

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[إلى الليل:] مهما ادّعيْتَ الـمُساواةَ
«كُـلُّـكَ للكُلِّ»... للحالمينَ وحُرَّاسِ
أحلامِهم. فلَنا قَمَرٌ ناقِصٌ، وَدَمٌ
لا يُغَيّرُ لونَ قميصِكَ يا لَيْل...

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To the night:
Whatever claims you make of equality
that “*all’s for all*” —
for dreamers and for those who guard their dreams,
our moon is incomplete.
Our bloodstains don’t dye the color of your shirt, O night!

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نُعَزِّي أَباً بابنِهِ: «كَرَّمَ اللهُ وَجْهَ الشهيدْ»
وبعد قليلٍ، نُهَـنِّــئُـه بِوليدٍ جديدْ.

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We offer our condolences
to a father for the loss of his son:
“May God generously reward his martyrdom!”
Then right away we congratulate him
on the birth of a *new* son.

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[إلى الموت:] نَعْرفُ من أيِّ دَبّـابَـةٍ
جِئْـتَ. نعرفِ ماذا تريدُ... فَعُدْ
ناقصاً خاتَماً. واعتذر للجنود وضُبّاطهم
قائلاً: قد رآني العروسانِ أنْظُرُ
نحوَهما، فَتَردَّدْتُ ثم أَعَدْتُ العروسَ
إلى أهْلها... باكيةْ!

إلهي... إلهي! لـماذا تخلَّيْتَ عَنّي
وما زلتُ طفلاً... ولم تَمْتَحِنّي؟

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To death:
We know which tank sent you
and we know what you want… *Go back*!
One wedding ring short!
Ask the soldiers and their officers to accept your excuse.
Say: “When the bride and groom saw me staring at them,
I paused, then returned her to her family…
in tears!”

My god, my God, why have you forsaken me?
I am still a child…You haven’t tested me yet!

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قالتِ الأُمُّ:
لم أَرَهُ ماشياً في دَمِـهْ
لم أَرَ الأُرْجُوانَ على قَدَمِـهْ
كانَ مُسْتَنِداً للجدارِ
وفي يَدِهِ
كأسٌ بابونَجٍ ساخِنٍ
ويُفَكِّـرُ في غَدِهِ...

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Said the Mother:
“I didn’t see him walking, bathed in his own blood.
I didn’t see the purple mark on his foot.
He was leaning up against a wall
with a cup of hot chamomile tea in his hand
fretting about tomorrow…”

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قالت الأُمُّ: في بادىء الأَمرِ لم
أَفْهمِ الأمرَ. قالوا: تزوَّجَ منذ
قليلٍ. فزَغْرَدتُ، ثُمَّ رَقَصْتُ وَغَنّيْتُ
حتى الهَزيعِ الأخيرِ منَ اللَّيـلِ، حيث
مضي السَاهرون ولم تبق إلا سلالُ
البَنَفْسجِ حَوْلي. تساءلتُ: أَينَ العَروسانِ؟
قِيلَ: هنالك فوق السماءِ مَلاكانِ
يَستَكْملان طُقوسَ الزواج. فَزَغْرَدتُ،
ثُمَّ رَقَصْتُ وَغَنَّيْتُ حتّى أَصِبْتُ
بداء الشَّلَل
فَمَتى يَنتهي، ياحبيبي، شَـهْرُ العَسَــلْ؟

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Said the Mother:
“In the beginning I didn’t understand what was happening.
They told me he’d gotten married,
and I uttered a shrill ululation and danced
and sang until dawn.
When the revelers were gone and left behind
nothing but baskets of violets, I asked:
‘Where are the bride and groom?’ And I heard:
‘*High above the sky are two angels*
completing their marriage vows.’
I uttered a shrill ululation, and danced and sang
until I became paralyzed.
When, my beloved, will this honeymoon end?”

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سيمتدُّ هذا الحصارُ إلى أن
يُحسَّ الـمُحاصِـرُ. مثل الـمُحاصَـرِ،
أنَّ للصَّــجَرْ
صِفةٌ من صِفات البَشَرْ

أَيُّــها الساهِرونَ! أَلم تتعبوا
من مراقبة الضوء في مِلْحِنا؟
من وَهَج الورد في جُرْحِـنا
ألم تتعبوا أَيُّــها الساهِرونْ؟

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This siege will not end until
those who are laying siege, like the people under siege,
accept boredom as part of human nature.

All you who stay up late, aren’t you sick of watching
the glitter in our salt,
the glowing roses in our wounds?
Hasn’t this gone on long enough?

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واقفون هنا. قاعدون هنا. دائمون هنا
خالدون هنا. ولنا هَدَفٌ واحدٌ واحدٌ: أَن نكون.
ومن بعدهِ نحن مُخْتَلِفونَ على كل شيءٍ:
على صورة العَلَم الوطنيّ
[سَتُحسِنُ صُنْعاً لو اخْتَرتَ يا
شعينيَ الحيَّ رمزَ الحمار البسيط]
وَمُخْتَلِفونَ على كلماتِ النشيدِ الجديدِ
[سَتُحْسِنُ صُنْعاً لو اخْتَرتَ أُغْنيّةً عن زواج الحمام]
ومُختلفون على واجبات النساءِ
[سَتُحسِنُ صُنْعاً لو اخْترتَ سيِّدةً لرئاسةِ أجهزة الأمن]
مُخْتَلِفونَ على النِسْبَةِ المئوية، والعام والخاص ،
مُخْتَلِفونَ على كل شيء. لنا هَدفٌ واحِدٌ: أن نكون...
ومن بعده يجد الفَرْدُ مُـتَّسـعاً لاختيار الهَدفْ

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Standing or sitting, perpetually, eternally,
we have just one goal: to be!
Beyond that, we disagree about everything –
we disagree on the design of our national flag
(*my people, you'd be wise to choose the modest donkey for its symbol!*).
We disagree about the words of the new anthem
(*you'd be wise to choose the marriage song of the mourning dove!*).
We disagree about the role of women
(*you'd be wise to choose a woman to preside*
over all security arrangements!).
We disagree on percentages, what's private, what's public,
but we agree on one thing: to be.
Beyond that, everyone should be free to choose
whatever goal he or she desires.

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عميقاً، عميقاً
يُواصِلُ فِعلُ الـمضارع
أَشـغالَهُ اليَدَويّةَ
في ما وراء الهَدفْ...

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The present tense squeezes all limits to the utmost
busying itself *beyond* the end…

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قال لي في الطريق إلى سِجْنِهِ:
عندما أتَحَرَّرُ أعرفُ
أنَّ مديحَ الوَطَنْ
كهجاءِ الوَطَنْ
مهنةٌ مثل باقي المِهَنْ

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On his way to prison, he told me:
“When I get out, I’ll know for sure
that a eulogy for the homeland and satirical poetry
are the same thing –
a business just like any other business.”

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بِلادٌ على أُهْبَةِ الفجرِ
أَيقظْ حصانَكَ
واصعَدْ
خفيفاً خفيفاً
لِتَسْبقَ حُلْمَكَ
واجلس - إذا ماطَلَتْكَ السماءُ -
على صَخرةٍ تَتَنَهَّد

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With a country on the verge of dawn.
Saddle up your horse, ride it with ease
and keep ahead of your dream.
Then when heaven betrays you
sit down on a rock that breathes a long sigh of grief.

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كيف أحْملُ حُرّيتي، كيف تحمِلُني؟ أَينَ
نسكُنُ من بعد عَقْدِ النِّكاح، وماذا
أقول لها في الصباح: أَنِمتِ لما ينبغي
أن تنامي إلى جانبي؟ وحَلُمتِ بأرض السماء
وهِمتِ بذاتِكِ. هل متِ سالـمَةً من منامِك
هل تَشربين معي الشايَ أم قهوةً بالحليبِ؟
وهل تُـؤثِـرين عصيرَ الفواكهِ أم قُبَلي؟
[كيف أجعلُ حُرّيتي حُرّة؟] يا غريبةُ!
لستُ غريبكِ. هذا السريرُ سريرُكِ. كوني
إباحيَّةً حُرّةً، لا نهائيّةً، وانثري جَسَدي
زهرةً زهرةً بلهاثك. حُريّتي! عَوّديني
عليكِ. خذيني إلى ما وراء المفاهيم كي
نصبح اثنين في واحدٍ!

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How do I bear the brunt of my freedom?
How can she tolerate my company?
Where will we live after the wedding?
What shall I ask her in the morning:
“*Did you sleep well beside me*
dreaming of the homeland of heaven?
Were you paranoid about yourself?
Did you wake from your dream safe and sound?
Will you drink with me – tea, coffee with milk?
Would you prefer fruit juice or my kisses?
How can I set my freedom free?” Stranger,
I am not your stranger. This bed is yours as well.
Be licentious, liberal, endless,
my body panting with yours
and bursting into flower after flower.
Let me get used to you, my freedom!
Lead me beyond ideas and conceptions –
let’s become two in one!

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كيف أحملها، كيف تحملني، كيف أصبح سيّدها
وأنا عبدها. كيف أجعل حرّيتي حُرَّةً
دون أن نفترقْ؟

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How can I bear her brunt? How can she tolerate me?
Since I am her slave, how can I become her master?
How can I free my freedom
without being split in two?

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قليلٌ من الـمُطلقِ الأزرقِ اللانهائيّ
يكفي
لتخفيف وَطْأَةِ هذا الزمانْ
وتنظيف حَمْأةِ هذا المكانْ

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A bit of the endless absolute blue is enough
to ease the burden of this time
and clean up the muck and mire of this place.

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سيمتدُّ هذا الحصاُ إلى أنْ
نُقَلّمَ أشجارنا
بأيدي الأطبّاء، والكَهَـنَـةْ

سيمتدُّ هذا الحصارُ، حصاري المجازيُّ،
حتى أُعَلِّم نفسيَ زُهدَ التأمُّل:
ما قبل نفسي — بكتْ سَوْسَنَةْ
وما بعد نفسي — بكتْ سَوْسَنَةْ
والمكانُ يُحَمْلقُ في عَبثِ الأزمنةْ

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This siege will not end until
the hands of physicians and priests
prune our trees.

This siege, my metaphorical siege, will not end
until I teach myself the asceticism of meditation.
Before my self – *a lily of the valley wept*.
After my self – *a lily of the valley wept*.
Place is gazing intently at the absurdity of Time.

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على الروح أن تَتَرَجّلْ
وتمشي على قَدَمَيْها الحريريَّـتَـيْـنِ
إلى جانبي، ويداً بيدٍ، هكذا صاحبَـيْـن
قديمَيْن يَقتسمانِ الرّغيفَ القديمَ
وكأسَ النبيذِ القديمِ
لِنَقْطَـعَ هذا الطريقَ معاً
ثم تذهبُ أيَّامُنا في اتجاهَيْنِ مُخْتَلفَيْنِ:
أنا ما وراء الطبيعةِ. أمَّا هيَ
فَتَختار أن تجلسَ القُرْفُصاءَ
على صخرةٍ عاليةْ

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Soul must alight on earth
and walk on her silken feet
beside me.
Hand in hand like old friends
who break old bread together
and share a cup of vintage wine,
we'll walk to the end of the road.
Then our days will take off in opposite directions:
I'll fade away beyond nature
as she heads off to crouch on a high rock.

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[إلى شاعر:] كُلَّما غابَ عنكَ الغيابْ
تَوَرّطتَ في عُزْلةِ الآلِهةْ
فكنْ «ذاتَ» موضوعِكَ التائهةْ
و «موضوعَ» ذاتِكَ،
كُنْ حاضراً في الغيابْ

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To a poet:
Every time you shun absence,
you grow morose in the isolation of the gods.
Be the wandering “essence” of your subject
and the “subject” of your essence.
Be present in absence!

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[إلى الشعر:] حاصِرْ حصارَكْ

[إلى النثر:] جُرَّ البراهينَ من
مُعْجَم الفُقَهاءِ إلى واقعٍ دَمّرَتْهُ
البراهينُ. واشرَحْ غُبارَكْ.

[إلى الشعرِ والنثر:] طيرا معاً
كجناحَي سُنونُوَّة تحملانِ الربيـعَ الـمُبارَكْ

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To poetry:
Lay siege to your siege!

To prose:
Find arguments
from the Dictionary of Jurisprudence
and apply them to a reality destroyed by arguments –
then explain your dust.

To poetry and prose:
Fly together like the wings of swallows
that carry the blessed Spring

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كتبتُ عن الحُبّ عشرينَ سطراً
فخُيِّلَ لي
أنّ هذا الحصارَ
تراجَعَ عشرينَ متراً!...

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After I wrote twenty lines about love
it seemed to me
the siege had been beaten back
by at least twenty meters.

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يجدُ الوقتَ للسخريةْ:
هاتفي لا يرنُّ
ولا جَرَسُ الباب أيضاً يَرِنُّ
فكيفِ تَيَـقَّـنْتِ من أنّني
لم أَكُنْ ههُنا؟

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He still finds time for irony:
“My phone never rings,
my doorbell never rings,
so how could she be so sure
I wasn’t home!”

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يجدُ الوقتَ للأُغنيةْ:
في انتظارِك، لا أستطيعُ انتظارَكِ
لا أستطيعُ قراءةَ دوستويفسكي
ولا الاستماعَ إلى «أمّ كلثوم» أو «ماريّا كالاس»
وغيرهما. في انتظارِكِ تمشي العقاربُ في
ساعةِ اليدِ نحوَ اليسار، إلى زَمَنٍ
لا مكانَ لَهُ،
في انتظارِكِ لم أنتَظِرْكِ، انتَظَرتُ الأَزَلْ

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He still finds time for song:
“Waiting for you, I can’t wait for you…
I can’t read Dostoevsky
or listen to Um Kulthum, Maria Callas,
or anyone else.
Waiting for you, the hands on my watch
turn left towards a placeless time.
Waiting for you, I’m not waiting for you –
I’m waiting for eternity.”

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يقولُ لها: أيَّ زهرٍ تُحِبينَهُ
فَتقول: أحبُّ القُرُنْفُلَ... أسودْ
يقولْ: إلى أين تَمضينَ بي،
والقرنفلُ أسودْ؟
يقولْ: إلى بؤرةِ الضوءِ في داخلي
وتقولُ: وأبْـعَد... أبعَدا... أبعَدْ.

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“What flower do you like?” he asks her.
“Carnation… *black* carnation,” she answers.
“If carnations are black, then
where are you taking me?” he asks.
“To the heart of light within me, she says,
and even further… even further.”

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[إلى الحُبِّ:] يا حُبُّ، يا طائرَ الغَيْب!
دَعْنا من الأزرق الأبديّ وحُمّى الغياب.
تَعالَ إلى مَطبخي لِنُعِدَّ العَشاءَ معاً.
سوفَ أطهو، وأنتَ تَصبُبُّ النبيذ،
وتاختارُ ما شئتَ من أُغنياتٍ تُذَكِّرنا
بحيادِ المكان وفوضى العواطف: إنْ
قيل إنَّكَ جِنسٌ من الجنِّ... صَدِّقْ!
وإن قيلَ إنّكَ نوعٌ من الأنفلونزا... فصدِّق!
وحَدِّقْ إليكَ ومَزِّقْ حجابك. لكنّك الآن
قُرْبي أليفٌ لطيفٌ تُقَشّرُ ثوما، وبعد العشاء
ستختار لي فيلماً عاطفيّاً قديماً،
لنشهدَ كيف غَدا البَطلان هناك
هنا شاهِديْن

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To love:
“You, love, bird of the unseen!
Let’s forget about the eternal blue
and the fevers of absence.
Come into my kitchen – let’s fix dinner.
I’ll cook, you serve the wine.
Choose whatever songs remind us
of the neutrality of place and the chaos of sentiments.
If it’s said you are a species of djinn… *you better believe it*!
If it’s said you are a flu virus… *you better believe it*!
Look at yourself and tear up your veil!
But right now you are beside me,
tame, tender and peeling garlic.
After dinner, choose a sentimental classic film
so we can see how the two main stars *in there*,
become the two living eyewitnesses *out here*.”

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في الصباح الذي سوف يعقبُ هذا الحصارْ
سوف تمضي فتاةٌ إلى حُبّها
بالقميص الـمُزَرْكَشِ، والبَنْطلونِ الرماديِّ
شَفَّافَةَ الـمَعنوياتِ كَالـمِشْمِشِيّاتِ في
شهر آذارَ: هذا النَّهارُ النا كُلُّهُ
كُلُّهُ، يا حبيبي، فلا تَتأخَرْ كثيراً
لئلاّ يحط غرابٌ على كتفي...
وستَقضمُ تُفّاحةً في انتظارِ الأملْ
في انتظار الحبيب الذي
ربّما، رُبَّما لن يَصلْ

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The morning after this siege ends
a girl in gray pants and embroidered shirt
will hurry to her love,
her spirit as transparent as the full bloom of
apricot trees in March:
“*Today, all day, is ours, my beloved*.
Don’t be too late, or else
a crow might land on my shoulder.”
While waiting, hopeful, she’ll bite into an apple—
…waiting for her beloved who might or
might not come.

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«أَنا، أَو هُوَ»
هكذا تبدأُ الحربُ. لكنها
تنتهي بلقاءٍ حَرِجْ:
«أنا وهو»

«أَنا هِيَ حتى الأَبَدْ»
هكذا يندأ الحُبّ. لكنه
عندما ينتهي
ينتهي بوداعٍ حَرِجْ:
«أَنا وهِيَ»

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“*It’s either him or me!*”
That’s the way a war starts. But
it ends with an embarrassing confrontation:
“Him *and* me!”

“I am eternally *her*.”
That’s the way love starts. But
it ends with an embarrassing adieu:
“Her *and* me.”

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لا أُحبُّـكَ، لا أكرهُكَ
قال مُعتَقَلٌ للمحَقِّـقِ: قلبي مَلِيءٌ
بما ليس يَعنيك. قلبي يفيضُ برائحةِ الـمَرْيَميَّةِ،
قلبي بريءٌ، مُضيءٌ مَليءٌ،
ولا وَقْتَ في القلب الامتحان. بلى
لا أُحبُّكَ. مَن أَنْتَ حتّى أُحبَّكَ
هل أنتَ بعضُ أناىَ، وموعدُ شايٍ
وَبُحَّةُ نايٍ، وأغنيةٌ كي أُحبَّكَ
لكنني أكرهُ الاعتقال ولا أكرهُكْ.
هكذا قال مُعْتَقَلٌ للمحقَّقِ: عاطِفتي
لا تَخُصُّكَ. عاطفتي هي لَيْلي الخصوصيُّ...
لَيْلي الذي يَتَحَرّكُ بين الوسائد حُرّاً
من الوزن والقافيةْ!

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“I don’t love you, and I don’t hate you,”
said a detainee to his interrogator.
“What fills my heart is none of your business.
My heart flows with aromas of sage.
My heart is above suspicion, glowing, full.
It has no time for minute examination.
But I certainly don’t love you. Why should I love you?
Are you a part of me?
A teatime rendezvous?
A plaintive tune played on a flute?
A song that *makes* me love you?
Sure, I hate to be detained, but I don’t hate you.
My passion is not your concern,
It’s my private night, my night gliding
from pillow to pillow, free
of all rhyme and meter.”

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سيمتدُّ هذا الحصارُ إلى أن يُنَقِّـحَ
إلياذةَ الخالدةْ «أولمب»سادةُ

سيولَدُ طفلٌ، هنا الآن،
في شارع الموت... في الساعة الواحدةْ

سياعب طِفلٌ بطائرةٍ من وَرَقْ
بألوانها الأربعةِ
أَحمر، أَسود، أَبيض، أَخضر
ثم يدلُ في نجمةٍ شاردةْ

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This siege will not end until
the masters of Mount Olympus
revise the immortal *Iliad*.

At exactly one o’clock here
on Death Street,
a baby will be born.

A boy will fly a red, black, white and green kite
and float off on a wandering star.

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جَلَسْنا بعيدِينَ عن / مصائرنا كطيورٍ
تُؤثِّثُ أعشاشَها في ثُقوبِ التماثيلِ،
أو في الـمداخنِ
أو في الخيامِ التي نُصِبَتْ
في طريقِ الأمير إلى رِحْلة الصَيْدْ...

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We were seated so far from…
Our destinies are birds that build nests in the nooks of statues,
inside chimneys, in tents pitched on the
road of the Prince’s hunting party…

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[إلى حارسٍ:] سأُعَلِّمُكَ الانتظارْ
على باب مَوْتي الـمؤجَّلْ
تمهَّلْ، تَمهَّلْ
لعلَّكَ تسأمُ منّي
وترفَعُ ظلَّكَ عَنّي
وتَدخلُ لَيْلكَ حُرّاً
بلا شَبَحى!

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To a guard:
I'll teach you how to wait by the door of my death
so often postponed.
Take your time.
You might get tired of me.
And take your shadow with you as you shrug off
to enter your night, free
of my ghost at last.

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[إلى حارسٍ آخر:] سأُعَلِّمُكَ الانتظارْ
على باب مَـقْهى
فتسمع دقّاتِ قَلبِكَ أبطأَ، أَسْرَعَ
قد تعرفُ القُشَعريرةَ مثلي
تَمَهَّلْ،
لِعلَّكَ مثلي تُصَفِّرُ لحناً يُهاجِرُ
أَنْدَلُسيَّ الأسى، فارسيَّ الـمدارْ
فيوجِعُكَ الياسمينُ وتَرحَلْ

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To another guard:
I'll teach you how to wait
by the café door
so you can hear your heart beat slower, then faster.
Like me, you might even get to know
that old familiar shudder.
Take your time.
You might whistle a meandering tune, as I do,
with some Andalusian sadness and the pathos of old Persia.
Jasmine would just cause you pain, so you better leave.

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[إلى حارسٍ ثالث:] سأُعَلِّمُكَ الانتظارْ
على مقْعَدٍ حَجَريٍّ، فقدْ
نتبادَلُ أسماءَنا. قد ترى
شَبَهاً طارئاً بَيْنَنا:
لكَ أمٌّ
ولي والدةْ
ولنا مَطَرٌ واحدٌ
ولنا قَمَرٌ واحدٌ
وغيابٌ قصيرٌ عن المائدةْ

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To a third guard:
I'll teach you how to wait
on a stone bench
so we can exchange names.
You might find there's
an accidental likeness between you and me:
you have a mother,
I have a mother.
We have one rain and one moon,
and a brief absence
from the banquet feast.

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على طَلَلي يَنْبُتُ الظلُّ أَخضَرَ،
والذئبُ يَغفو على شَعْرِ شاتي
ويحلُمُ مثلي،
ومثل الملاكْ
بأنّ احياةَ هنا
لا هُناكْ...

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A shadow grows green over the stubble of my ruins
and a wolf sleeps on my sheep’s fleece
dreaming the way I do,
the way an angel dreams,
that life is right here,
not over there…

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الأساطيرُ ترفضُ تَعْديلَ حَبْكَتها
ربما مَسّها خَللٌ طارئٌ
ربّما جَنَحَت سُفُنٌ نحو يابسةٍ
غيرِ مأهولةٍ،
فأصيبَ الخياليُّ بالواقعيِّ...
ولكنها لا تُغَيّرُ حَبْكَتَها.
كُلَّما وَجَدَت واقعاً لا يُلائِمُها
عَدَّلته بِجَرّافَةٍ،
فالحقيقةُ جاريةُ النصّ، حسناءُ
بيضاءُ من غير سوء...

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Myths refuse to adjust their plots.
They might mesh, for just a moment, with a certain flaw.
Ships might drift towards land, towards a bewildered land,
and the imaginary might afflict the real.
But they refuse to adjust their plots.
To confront an undesirable reality they simply
"*adjust*" it with bulldozers.
For the truth, holy writ,
obedient maidservant to her master,
is too gorgeous, pale-skinned and without blemish.

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[إلى شبه مستشرق:] لِيكن ما تَظُنُّ
لِنفترض الآن أني غَبيٌّ، غَبيٌّ، غَبيٌّ
ولا ألعبُ الجولف،
لا أفهمُ التكنولوجيا،
ولا أستطيعُ قيادةَ طَيّارةٍ!
ألهذا أخذتَ حياتي لتصنعَ منها حياتَكَ
لو كُنتَ غيرَكَ، لو كُنتُ غيري
لَكنَّا صديقَيْنِ يَعترفانِ بحاجتنا للغباء...
أما للغبيِّ، كما لليهوديِّ في
«تاجر البندقية» قَلبٌ، وخُبزٌ
وعينانِ تغرَوْرقان

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To a quasi-Orientalist:
Think what you like…
let's presume I'm stupid:
I don't play golf, I don't understand new technology;
I can't fly an airplane –
Is this justification to rob me of my life and then
live on top of it?
If you were not you and I were not I
we might be friends,
even agreeing to our need for a certain stupidity.
For hath not the stupid one "*heart, bread,*
and eyes full of tears," like the Jew
in *The Merchant of Venice*?

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في الحضارِ، يصيرُ الزمانُ مكاناً
تَحَجَّرَ في أَبَدِهْ
في الحصارِ، يَصيرُ المكانُ زماناً
تَخَلَّفَ عن مَوْعِدِهْ

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Under siege, time becomes place
petrified for an eternity.
And place becomes time
lagging far behind its juncture.

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الـمكانُ هو الرائحةْ
عِندما أتذَكَّرُ أرضاً
أَشُمُّ دَمَ الرائحة
وأَحِنُّ إلى نفسيَ النازحةْ

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Place is its odor.
When I think of the land
I sm ell the blood of its scent
and hanker for my roaming self.

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هذه الأضُ واطئةٌ، عاليةْ
أو مُقَدّسةٌ زانيةْ
لا نُبالي كثيراً بِفِقْهِ الصّفاتِ
فقد يُصبحُ الفَرْجُ،
فَرْجُ السمواتِ،
جغرافيةْ!

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We don’t care if this land is high or low, holy or whore,
or about the artful details of its attributes.
Let the crotch of heaven
be its geography!

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أَلشهيدُ يُحاصرني كُلّما عِشْتُ يوماً جديداً
ويسأَلُني: أينَ كُنْتَ؟
أَعِدْ للقواميس كُلَّ الكلام الذي
كُنتَ أَهْدَيْتِنيهِ،
وخفِّف عن النائمين طنينَ الصّدى

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Each day I’m alive a martyr lays siege to me.
He demands: “Where have you been?
Retract all the pretty words you’ve pinned on me
and put them back in their dictionaries –
don’t annoy the sleepers with your buzzing echo!”

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أَلشهيدُ يُوَضِّحُ لي: لم أُفَتّش وراء المدى
عن عذارى الخلود، فإني أحبُّ الحياةَ
على الأرض، بين الصنوبر والتين، لكنني
ما استطعت إليها سبيلاً
فَفَتَّشْتُ عنها بآخرِ ما أملكُ:
الدمُ في جسدِ اللازوردْ

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The martyr explains:
“I’m not looking beyond the horizon
for virgins of eternity. I love the earth,
to live among its fig trees and pines!
But I can’t find a single entrance into life
though I’ve spent my last dime searching for it:
blood in a body of lapis lazuli.”

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أَلشهيدُ يُعَلِّمُني: لا جَماليَّ خارجَ حُرّيَتي

أَلشهيدُ يُحَذِّرُني: لا تُصَدِّق زغاريدَهُنّ
وَصَدّقْ أبي حين ينظرُ في صورتي باكياً:
كَيْفَ بَدَّلْـتَ أدوارَنا، يا بُنَيَّ
وَسِرْتَ أمامي؟
أَنا أَوَّلاً
أَوَّلاً وأنا؟

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The martyr teaches me:
no aesthetics without my freedom.

The martyr warns me:
don’t believe their grieving ululations –
believe my father who bursts into tears
    when he looks at my photo:
“How did you manage to trade places with me, my son –
leaving this world before me?
I should have been first! *I should have been first*!”

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أَلشهيدُ يُحاصرُني: لم أُغَيّر سوى مَوْقعي
وأقاثي الفقيرِ، وَضَغْتُ غزالاً على مَخدعي
وهِلالاً على إصبعي
كي أخَفّفَ من وَجَعي

أَلشهيدُ يُحاصرُني: لا تَسِرْ في الجَنازَةِ
إلاّ إذا كُنْتَ تَعرفُني.
لا أريدُ مجاملةً من أَحَد.

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The martyr lays siege to me:
I’ve only moved from one place to another and rearranged
my meager furniture.
I’ve put a gazelle in my bed and a crescent on my fingertip
to ease my pain.

The martyr lays siege to me:
“Don’t come to my funeral unless you knew me personally.
I don't want just anyone's kudos.”

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سَيَشْتدُّ هذا الحصارْ
لِيُقنعنا
باختيارِ عُبوديَّةٍ لا تَضُرُّ
ولكن بحريَّةٍ كاملةْ

أَن تُقاوِمَ يعني: التأكُّدَ مِنْ
صحَّةِ القلبِ والخُصْيَتَيْنِ،
ومن دائِكَ المتأصِّلِ:
داءِ الأملْ

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This siege will grow even harsher to convince us
that we should choose some harmless slavery
as if by our own *freewill*.

To resist is to be convinced
of the good health of your heart and your balls,
and of that worst of afflictions: *hope*.

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وفي ما تَبَقّى من الفجرِ أَمْشي إلى خارجي
وفي ما تبقَّى من الليل أَسْمَعُ وَقْعَ الخُطى داخلي

إذا مَرِضَ الحُبُّ عالَجْتُـهُ
بالرّياضة والسّخريةْ
وبِفَصْلِ الـمُغَنّي من.. الأُغنيةْ

أَلحصار يُحوّلني من مُغَنَّ إلى...
وَتَرٍ سادس في الكمانْ

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In what remains of the dawn I take a walk outside myself.
In what remains of the night I hear heavy footsteps within me.

When love feels sick, I prescribe it physical exercise and irony,
and separate the singer from the song.

The siege transforms me from being a singer to…
the sixth string on a violin.

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[إلى قارىء:] لا تثقْ بالقصيدةِ،
بنتِ الغياب،
فلاهِيَ حَدْسٌ
ولا هِيَ فُكِرٌ
ولكنها حاسّة الهاويةْ

الكتابة جَرْوٌ صغيرٌ يَعَضُّ العَدَمْ
الكتابةُ تجرحُ من دون دَمْ

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To a reader:
Don’t trust the poem, that daughter of the unseen –
it’s neither intuition nor thought,
but a preview of the abyss.

Writing is a puppy snapping at nothingness,
composing bloodless wounds.

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أصدقائي يُعِدّونَ لي دائماً حَفْلةً
للوداع، وقَبْراً مريحاً يُظَـلِّلُــهُ السنديانُ
وشاهدةً من رُخام الزَمَنْ
فأسبِقهم دائماً في الجنازةِ:
مَنْ ماتَ ... مَن؟

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My friends are always organizing farewell parties for me:
a comfy grave shaded by an evergreen oak tree
with a tombstone engraved from time’s very own marble –
but I’m always the first to arrive:
“So, who died? Who!”

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أَلشهيدةُ بنتُ الشهيدة بنتُ الشهيد
وأُختُ الشهيد وأختُ الشهيدة كِنَّةُ
أُمِّ الشهيُ حفيدةُ جَدِّ شهيد
وجارةُ عمِّ الشهيد [الخ... الخ...]
ولا شيء يحدُثُ في العالم المتمدِّنِ،
فالزمنُ البربريُّ انتهى،
والضَّحيّةُ مجهولَةُ الإسم، عاديَّـةٌ
والضَّحيَّةُ.. مثل الحقيقة.. نسبيةٌ
[الخ... الخ...]

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The martyr is daughter of the father-martyr,
daughter of the mother-martyr,
sister of the brother-martyr,
sister of the sister-martyr,
sister-in-law of the martyr's mother,
granddaughter of the martyr's grandfather
neighbor of the martyr's uncle, *etcetera*, *etcetera*…
Nevertheless, the civilized world has hardened itself
with indifferent ice
and the Barbaric Age is passing us by,
while the victim doesn't even get a name,
much less a nominal one.
"The victim, like the truth, is… *relative*,"
etcetera, etcetera…

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هدوءاً، هدوءاً، فإن الجُنودَ يريدونَ
في هذهِ الساعَةِ الاستماعَ إلى الأُغنياتِ
التي استَمَعَ الشُّهَداء إليها، وظلّتْ
كرائحة البُنِّ في دَمِهِمْ... طازجَة

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Be quiet – *quiet*!
The soldiers are trying to listen to the same songs
the martyrs listened to
while they’re still circulating in their blood
like the smell of fresh coffee.

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هُدْنَةً، هِدْنَةً لا ختبار التعاليم:
هل تَصلُحُ الطائراتُ مَحاريثَ؟
قُـلْنا لهم: هُدْنَةً، هُدْنَةً لامتحان النوايا،
فقد يتسرَّبُ شيءٌ من السِّـلْم للنفس!
عندئذ نتبارى على حُبَّ أشيائنا
بوسائلَ شِـعْريّةٍ.
فأجابوا: ألا تعلمونَ بأنَّ السلامَ معَ النَّفْسِ
يفتحُ أبوابَ قَـلْعَتِنا
لِمَقامِ الحجاز أو النَّهَوَند؟
فقلنا: وماذا؟... وبَعْد؟

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It’s a truce after a truce – to test the teachings:
are warplanes needed to plow the land?
We told them: a truce – to test intentions.
Some particles of peace might sneak into our hearts
inspiring us to adopt poetic means
to come to terms for the things we love.
They answer: “But don’t you realize
that such a peace with the self
would fling open the doors of our fortress to
hijazi and *nahawandi* musical modes?
We said: “So what? And after that?”

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فناجينُ قوتنا، واعصافيرُ، والشَّجَرُ الأَخْضَرُ
الأزرقُ الظلِّ، واشّمسُ تقفزُ من
حائط نحو آخَرَ مثْلَ الغزالة...
والماءُ في السُّحُبِ اللانهائيَّة الشكلِ
في ما تبقّى لنا من سماء،
وأشياءُ أُخْرى مُؤَجَّــلةُ الذكريات
تدلُّ على أنَّ الصباحَ قويٌّ بهيٌّ،
وأَنَّــا ضيوفٌ على الأَبَديّـةْ

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…Our little coffee cups,
singing birds and green trees that spread blue shade,
sunlight leaping from one garden wall to another like a gazelle,
thick moisture in endlessly shifting clouds
in what little sky is left to us –
these and so many other things
whose memory has been postponed,
signs that this morning is radiantly majestic
and that we are guests of eternity…

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بلادٌ على أُهْبةِ الفَجْرِ،
عَمّا قليلْ
تنامُ الكواكبُ في لُغَةِ الشِّـعْر.
عَمّا قليلْ
نودّعُ هذا الطريقَ الطّويلْ
ونَسألُ: من أينَ نبدأُ؟
عَمّا قليلْ
نُحَذِّرُ نرجِسَنا الجَبَليَّ الجميلْ
من الإفتتَن بصورَتِـهِ: لم تَـعُـدْ
صالحاً للقصيدةِ، فانظرْ
إلى عابرات السبيلْ

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With a country on the verge of dawn.
After a while stars fall asleep in the language of poetry.
After a while we'll head off down this long road
and ask: "Where do we start?"
After a while we'll accuse our beautiful *Narcissus of the Mountain*
of self infatuation: "You're no longer
what we need for our odes –
go ogle the girls in the street!"

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سلامٌ على مَنْ يُشاطِرُني الانتباهَ إلى
نَشْـوَةِ الضوءِ، ضوءِ الفَراشَةِ، في
لَـيْــل هذا النَّـفَـقْ!

سلامٌ على مَنْ يُقاسِـمُني قَدَحي
في كثافَة لَـيْلٍ يفيض من المقعَدَيْـن:
سلامٌ على شَبَحي!

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Peace be upon whoever shares the rapture of light with me,
light of a butterfly fluttering in this tunnel’s dark.

Peace be upon whoever shares my cup
when thick night overflows from our vantage points –
peace be upon my double!

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أَلسلامُ كلامُ الـمُسافرِ في نَفْسِـهِ
للـمسافر في الجِهَةِ الثانِيَةْ...

أَلسلامُ حَمامُ غَريبَيْنِ يقتسمان الهديلَ
الأخيرَ على حافَةِ الهاويةْ

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Peace is a traveler’s inner debate
with a second traveler off in an opposite direction…

Peace, the doves of two strangers cooing sweet farewells
at the edge of an abyss.

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أَلسلامُ حنينُ عَدُوَّين، كُلٌّ على حِدَةٍ
للتثاؤبِ فوقَ رصيفِ الصّجَرْ

أَلسلامُ أَنينُ مُحِبَّـيْنِ يَغتسلانِ
بضوء القَمَرْ

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Peace, the longing of two hardened enemies
to yawn spontaneously on the sidewalks of boredom.

Peace, the sigh of two lovers bathing in moonlight.

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أَلسلامُ اعتذارُ الويِّ لِـمن هُوَ
أَضْعَفُ منه سلاحاً، وأَقوى مَدى

أَلسلامُ انكسارُ السيوف أَمام الجَمالِ
الطبيعيِّ، حيثُ يَفُلُّ الحديدَ النّدى

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Peace, when the stronger apologizes to the weaker,
who are weaker only in weaponry,
though theirs is the endless horizon.

Peace, the victory of natural beauty over swords –
iron shattered by dewdrops.

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أَلسلامُ نهارٌ أليفٌ، لطيفٌ، خفيفُ
الخُطى، لا يُعادي أَحَدْ

أَلسلامُ قطارٌ يُوَحِّدُ سُـكَّانَه العائدينَ
أَو الذاهبينَ إلى نزهَةٍ في ضواحي الأَبَدْ

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Peace, a well-behaved, gently moving day
antagonizing no one.

Peace, a train where two-way passengers team up together
as they picnic on the outer rims of eternity.

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أَلسلامُ هو الاعترافُ، علانيَةً، بالحقيقةِ:
ماذا صَنَعتُمْ بطيفِ القتيلْ؟

أَلسلامُ هُوَ الاعترافُ إلى عَمَلٍ في الحديقة:
ماذا سنزرعُ عمَّا قليلْ؟

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Peace, to nakedly admit the truth:
“What have you done with the victim’s apparition?”

Peace, a dedication to the garden:
“What should we plant… (sometime soon)?”

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أَلسلامُ هو الانتباهُ إلى الجاذِبيّةِ في
مُقْـلَتَي ثَعْلِبٍ تُغْوِيان الغريزةَ في امرأةٍ خائفةْ

أَلسلامُ هو الآهُ تُسنِدُ مُرْتَفَعاتِ
الـمُوَشّـحِ، في قلب جيتارةٍ نازِفةْ

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Peace, the come-hither focus in the eyes of a fox
seducing a frightened woman.

Peace, the *Olé*! of a bleeding guitar
hugging the heights of an Andalusian song.

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أَلسلامُ رِثاءُ فتىً ثَقَبَتْ قلبَهُ شامَةُ امرأةٍ، لاَ رصاصٌ ولا قُنْبُلةْ

أَلسلامُ غِناءُ حياةٍ هنا، في الحياةِ، على وَتَرِ السّنبُلةْ

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Peace, elegy for a youth hit squarely in the heart
not by bullets or a bomb, but by a woman’s beauty-mark.

Peace, a song for life itself
sung by a tassel of living wheat.

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